

NSC BRIEFING

17 December 1958

MAO TSE-TUNG'S STATUS

I.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Mao Tse-tung intends to give to give up his duties as chairman of the Chinese Communist government.

A. Peiping announced yesterday (17 Dec) that recent party plenum had approved Mao's request that he not be nominated next month for another four-year term in the government post.

B. Mao told the plenum that he wanted to concentrate on national policy and to have more time to write on theory.

C. [REDACTED] Mao also said his resignation would make Chinese picture look better than Russian--in that Khrushchev is leader of Soviet government as well as party. This is misleading, however, as Mao, unlike Khrushchev, does not hold the key government post of premier.

II. We believe Mao's story--that he wants to conserve his energy for his much more important role as party leader.

A. Mao, 65 next week, has often been ill in past two years.

[REDACTED]

- B. ChiCom press itself admitted, through last May, that Mao had trouble walking and was easily fatigued. Press has stopped revealing Mao's ailments but we think he still has them.
- C. Apparent for some time that Mao has been unable to work as hard as he once did, and has been forced increasingly to delegate responsibility.
- D. The post of government chairman carries little authority, entails many tiring ceremonial duties. (Right man for it is unimportant party senior, such as Chu Te.)

III. Mao apparently intends to retain all of his party posts.

- A. He is chairman of central committee, chairman of politburo, senior member of politburo standing committee (a super-politburo, the core of power).
- B. In these posts, Mao clearly dominates the party, and, through the party, the government.
- C. Mao two years ago prepared for his eventual retirement by authorizing central committee to set up (if needed) post of "honorary" chairman.

IV. Most unlikely that opposition to Mao's policies was a factor in his decision.

- A. Mao's "time for troubles" was 1957, when some of his policies had clearly gone wrong--his intervention in economic planning, the "liberal" features of his line on intrabloc relations, his experiment with "liberalization" at home.

- B. In mid-1957, Mao began to correct his mistakes. Since then, his prestige restored--especially by the "giant leap forward" in economic development, and by success to date in herding Chinese people into "communes."

- C. True that "communes" program does run into some trouble; Peiping announced today a decision to postpone the program for large cities because "bourgeois ideology is still fairly prevalent" among the capitalist and intellectual urban resident.
1. Efforts to establish communes in Peiping and Shanghai caused much confusion and concern (bank depositors were withdrawing and spending their savings; and private possessions up for sale were glutting the market).
 2. Overseas Chinese distressed by news of communes, and remittances to mainland relatives have dropped.
- D. But the Party plenum has just expressed delight in the "leap" and placed "very high evaluation" on communes campaign.

Approved For Release 2004/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A001000080003-5

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